



IDNR Forestry

Cooperative Forest Management Section

“Indiana’s Private Forestlands”

Strategic Direction For 2008-2012

July 10, 2007 (Draft)

Indiana’s Private Forests:

The Hoosier quality of life, and the health of the State and nation are directly linked to the integrity, sustainability and productivity of the privately owned forests. These forests comprise 85% of the state’s commercial forestlands and 25% of the Hoosier rural landscape. They are among the world’s most productive forests and supply benefits available nowhere else. Including:

- Indiana’s private forests provide economic vitality and produces over 95% of Indiana’s wood to fuel Indiana’s hardwoods economy- the largest economic sector of Indiana agriculture.
- Water is cleaner where forest cover protects watersheds and riparian corridors- there is no better protector of Indiana’s watersheds.
- Forest provide habitat required by the majority of Indiana’s wildlife species which depend on forests for all or part of their life cycle.
- Healthy forests clean the air and store huge amounts of carbon to offset carbon emissions.
- Indiana’s private forests are irreplaceable ecological havens, which also provide significant recreational opportunities, respites and community economic benefits.

The Division of Forestry’s Private Forestland Mission:

It is an important mission of the Division of Forestry to *insure the long term sustainability of Indiana’s privately owned forestland for the many benefits these forests provide.* We do this through a set of programs designed to retain, restore and wisely manage private forestland.

Key Issues Affecting the Sustainability of Indiana’s Private Forests

- ✓ Indiana’s forests face significant threats to their sustainability. Including the following key threats:
 - The lack of management or inappropriate management of forest resources.
 - Inappropriate development of forestland, and public policies that encourage or accelerate forest losses.
 - Inadequate incentives to retain forests, restore forests, and manage forests for the goods and services needed.
 - Inadequate public understanding of the economic potential and proper management of Indiana’s forests.
 - Invasive plant and animal species, which threaten forest health and productivity.
 - Inadequate coordination of public and private efforts to address the sustainability of Indiana’s forests.
 - Short and long term accessibility of forest owner assistance programs, and resource management incentives.
 - The high cost of owning and managing forests as a long term investment.
 - The turnover rate in land ownership is expected to swell and threaten forest sustainability.

The strategic proposals and actions below focus on key issues facing Indiana's private forests in the coming decades. Insuring their health and sustainability will require short and long term strategies which take into account the long planning horizons, and long term forest pressures often coupled with short term windows of opportunity.

Strategic Direction- PROPOSALS

Retain Working Forests at Current Levels

1) Strengthen the Classified Forest & Wildlands Program by adding value for participating counties and landowners.

- a. **Issue:** The Classified Forest & Wildlands program provides property tax incentives to retain and manage forest lands. It is Indiana's primary incentive program encouraging landowners to retain working forests for watershed protection, wildlife habitat, and wood products. Retained, well managed forests provide substantial public benefits. Additional value is needed to expand landowner participation beyond the current 15%.
- b. **Action:** Modify the Classified Forest & Wildlands program to add value for program participants and counties. For participants this may include accelerated write-off of forest management expenses, Indiana capital gains treatment of timber income, carbon credit payments, preferential access to cost share incentives for land management.

2) Long Term Forest Conservation Agreements with Forest Owners

- a. **Issue:** Many landowners are concerned about the future of Indiana forests. Some are concerned about the forests they have owned and managed for decades. Others are concerned about forests in general and are willing and able to invest in long term conservation. The retention of environmentally important forests is a State wide concern. Few options currently exist to insure the long term retention of these forests.
- b. **Action:** Develop long term land conservation options to retain critical Indiana forests. The program would allow and provide incentives for participants to enter long term land protection and management agreements with Indiana or qualified conservation organizations. These agreements would prohibit development activity on the land, while maintaining rights of owners to undertake resource management activities.

3) Local Planning to Conserve Working Forests

- a. **Issue:** Local public policies significantly affect the retention and stewardship of Indiana's private forestlands. Conversely local policy can accelerate the break-up of forestland, conversion to non-forest uses, and threaten forest sustainability beyond the immediate impact area.
- b. **Action:** Encourage local planning and zoning officials to give due consideration to the full range of values provided by fully functional working forests. Provide technical and scientific assistance to local units of government to address forest resources within comprehensive plans and ordinances which encourage forest retention, management and restoration. (e.g. model ordinances, definitions of important forests, etc.).

Accelerate the Restoration Indiana's Private Forests to Insure Long Term Forest Health

- 1) **Provide landowners with incentives to accelerate management of working forests (Adding Value for Conservation Landowners)**
 - a. **Issue:** The health and productivity of Indiana's private forests impacts not only the current landowner- it also impacts future owners, neighboring owners, communities and the public at large. However, only a small percentage of Indiana landowners actively manage their forests for the resources they provide. Lack of incentives to undertake management activities for a long term venture is often cited as a reason for inaction.
 - b. **Action:** 1) Establish a permanent Forest Restoration Fund with dedicated funding to accelerate the management of private forestlands. Funds would be utilized for the following: Forest restoration, timber stand improvement, reforestation tree plantings, forest erosion control. 2) Develop additional market incentives for ecosystem services provided by healthy forests, such as carbon trading and drinking water protection.
- 2) **Accelerate the restoration of forests on critical non-forested areas.**
 - a. **Issue:** Forest restoration can help address water pollution concerns in water supply reservoirs, unhealthy streams and wetlands. Restoration can also enhance wildlife habitats and mitigate air quality concerns. The environmental benefits to society of restoring forests is immediate. However, to the landowner restoration can be costly and the economic payoff not seen in their lifetime. Additional incentives are needed to accelerate the rate of forest restoration on important lands.
 - b. **Action:** Establish incentives and a permanent Forest Restoration Fund with dedicated funding to accelerate the restoration of forests on targeted lands. Expand the CREP programs to priority watersheds in Indiana where forest retention and restoration are critical strategies to improve water quality. Recruit public and private funding needed for this expansion.

Protecting Forest Resources and Sustainability

- 1) **Build incentives to boost implementation of forestry Best Management Practices (BMPs)**
 - o **Issue:** Timber in Indiana is a valuable commodity, and its harvesting significantly impacts the forest. While most logging in Indiana is conducted with adequate concern for the forest there are also plenty of cases to the contrary. A 'bad actors' law would mandate a base set of forestry best management practices to protect water quality. These standards would improve timber harvest practices and reduce detrimental soil erosion and water quality impacts of substandard harvesting practices.
 - o **Action:** Work with the forest community (e.g. industry, landowner and other groups) to develop a 'Bad Actors' law to address abusive timber harvesting practices. This could include licensing of professional foresters.

2) Improve access to forestry knowledge and technical information

- **Issue:** Forest owners often cite the poor access to forestry information as a limiting factor in their ability and willingness to undertake forest conservation projects on their land.
- **Action:** 1) Develop and utilize an expanded series of ‘demonstration forests’ in cooperation with private landowners, conservation organizations, community forests and others to serve as examples of good forest management. 2) Develop a forest mentor program to utilize knowledgeable, enthused landowners and specialists to reach new forest owners.

3) Forestry Commerce web site – Improving access to the forest market place

- **Issue:** Landowners, natural resource managers and the forest industry offer many goods and services. They also provide a market for forest products. However, difficulties finding and accessing these services and markets hampers forest conservation efforts, and limits the economic vitality of the forest products sector.
- **Action:** Develop a ‘Forestry Commerce’ web site in concert with other forestry partners to advertise timber available, consulting services, forest products material wanted, services needed, etc. This site would help provide easy access to technical assistance and facilitate business networking that will enhance Indiana’s forest related industries and services.

4) Improve Landowner Access and Scope of Forestry Assistance

- **Issue:** The vast majority of Indiana’s 100,000+ forest owners receive no professional forestry advice to guide the management of their land. Every year there is an estimated 10,000 new forest owners. State District Foresters currently assist approximately 2,300 landowners annually- each taking 2-10 hours. The potential and need is much higher than now served.
- **Action:** 1) Develop innovative approaches to reach more landowners, especially previously unserved landowners. 2) Implement a “premium service” fee system for DNR assistance above the base services. 3) Expand the number of public and private foresters in the market place.

Comments may be sent to: forestryinfo@dnr.IN.gov

Please indicate “Forestry Plan” in the subject line of your e-mail.